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ROSAMUND

A Dramatic Poem

BY

GEORGE STERLING



AUTHOR OF

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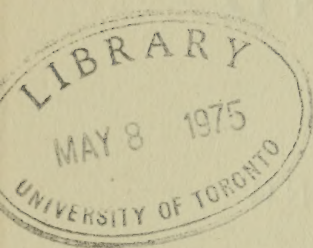
Lilith



A. M. ROBERTSON

San Francisco

1920



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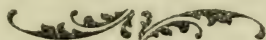
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TO
ALBERT ABRAMS
A. M., M. D., LL. D., F. R. M. S.
Great Genius and True Friend

THE story of Rosamund may be found in Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." I have not departed materially from the tale as therein written. It has been used by Sir William D'avenant in his tragedy, "Albovine," first printed in 1629, and possibly by other Elizabethan dramatists.

G. S.

ROSAMUND



ACT I

Scene 1.

The sixth century of the Christian era, with Justin emperor at Byzantium.

The banquet hall of the aged Turisund, king of the Gepidae, a nation occupying the territory now comprised by Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania and other parts of Hungary beyond the Danube. He enters, accompanied by Alboin, the only son of Audoin, king of the Lombards. He is young, huge and bearded. With him are two score warriors of his nation, and with Turisund four score Gepidan chiefs. They proceed to the great table that nearly covers the floor-space of the hall.

Turisund:

(To Alboin) Take thou the seat at my right hand,
O prince!

(1)

Alboin:

I thank thee, sire.

(They seat themselves.)

Turisund:

Alas! that it were filled
By him who feasted there so many years!

Alboin:

Sire, was it Harra's seat?

Turisund:

'T was my son's seat,
But thou who fillest it hast emptied it.

Alboin:

The fight was fair, and he an older sword
Than I.

Turisund:

'T is true. In war such things must be;
And I have risen by war.

Alboin:

Bethink thee, king,
That had I fallen, and not he, the seat
Were ever empty at my father's side;
But thou hast still a son.

Turisund:

Where is my son?

(To Afla, a Gepidan captain)

Why comes not Cunimund to the feast?

Afla:

O king,

Shall I speak freely?

Turisund:

Speak the truth.

Afla:

Thy son

Declares he will not sit at meat with him

Who slew his brother.

Turisund:

(angrily)

What affront is this,

And violation of the use of kings?

Is Cunimund a child? Go! Bid him here,

And swiftly! *(to Alboin)* Pardon in my son this
lack

Of courtesy! He loved his brother well,

And grief has blinded him to what belongs

To royal hospitality.

Alboin:

Forget

The matter. 'T is a trifle. Who shall lose

Thus heavily, and not resent?

(3)

Turisund:

Nay! Nay!

He shall crave pardon in the sight of all.
My time is nearly come, but I am king
And will be king till then.

(Enter Cunimund, a man of forty.)

O Cunimund,
Have not thy years taught courtesy? Art wolf?
Art Scythian? Hast eaten from a shield
Since birth? Wast suckled by a bear? Greet now
Our guest, and bid him welcome.

Cunimund:

Welcome him
Who slew thy son, my brother? Rather look
To see this sword come steaming from his heart!

Turisund:

I am shamed before a Lombard!

Cunimund:

Shalt thou care
For Lombard thought or word or deed? Behold!
They are Barbarian! In shape and smell
Thou shalt not know them from Sarmatian mares!

Alboin:

Add to the likeness, thou, another thing:
That they can kick. Get thee to Asfield's plain

And hunt thy brother's bones! They mingle there
With bones of animals as vile!

(Cunimund draws his sword. Turisund, rising, grasps his arm. The Gepidan chieftains spring up with cries of vengeance, and the Lombard warriors put themselves on their guard.)

Cunimund:

Thy blood
Shall buy those words! Thy corpse shall hang
with swine
Upon an oak!

Turisund:

(to Cunimund) Down! Down! Thou raving wolf!
Knowest thou what thou dost! Shall the world
ring
With our dishonor? Shall its songs repeat
A legend of this hospitality?
Shall such a deed be bruited to the Franks?
Nay! Infamy is on us if these men
Are scathed! What! Kill a helpless guest! Art mad,
To turn a welcome to a treachery?

(Cunimund takes his seat)

'T is well, my son!

(to the Gepidans.)

Sheath swords! Down! Down!

(The warriors seat themselves.)

Thank God!

That I have saved my nation from this shame!

(to Alboin) My son should crave thy pardon from
his knees,

But it were best, perchance, dissensions burn
No deeper.

Alboin:

It is best. The injury
Is still on thee and thine.

Turisund:

The fate of war.

Alboin:

Truly. And now war's usages demand
That which must wound a father's heart.

Turisund:

What then?

Alboin:

It is the Lombard custom that none sit
At feast among the captains save he wear
The harness of a fallen foe—a foe
Of his own station, slain by him. I came
To ask of thee the armor of thy son.

Turisund:

Ah, God! This last blow at a father's breast!
For this there is no armor. It is just:
I will abide thy usage; not, indeed,
That Lombard laws commend them so to me,
But for thy bravery, that thou hast come,
Half-helpless, to the stronghold of thy foes,
On such a quest. Surely thy heart is strong!
Scarcely it needs cuirass. (*to Afla*) Bring now
to me

Dead Harra's harness. (*Exit Afla.*)

Cunimund:

What is this? Would he
Regale his nostrils with the smell of blood?
Let him come forth with me and he shall smell
His own!

Turisund:

Peace! Peace! Thy sword has come too near
To shame already.

Cunimund:

Shall a Lombard wear
The harness of my brother?

Turisund:

'T is a law
Among his people.

Cunimund:

What have we to do
With Lombard law?

Turisund:

He trusted in our own,
And in my magnanimity. He came
As tribute to our honor. He shall go
A witness of that honor.

*(Afla enters with the blood-stained
harness of Harra, which he casts
ringing at the feet of Turisund.)*

Cunimund:

There shall be
Another judgment, ere that armor rust!

Turisund:

(to Alboin) 'T is well that thou art big: my Harra
used

Large panoply. Doff now thine own.

(He takes up the cuirass.)

Alas!

Behold the fissure at the side! There drave
Thy spear! The blood is dark around the rent.
Alas! My son!

(Tears stream down the white beard of Turisund.)

Cunimund:

(*to Alboin*)

Thou shalt pay well for this!

Alboin:

I stand prepared.

Turisund:

Fear nothing.

Cunimund:

Nothing now!

Alboin:

(*to Cunimund*) I fear not thee!

Turisund:

Enough! Let me have done!

I would make haste, then go to mine own couch

And mourn my son, once of the mightiest,

Now . . . Bare thy breast, O Prince!

(*Alboin takes off his cuirass.*)

Take thou this gift

From one to whom thy gift has been these tears.

(*He binds on Alboin the cuirass of Harra, and places the helmet on the youth's head. The Gepidans and Lombards, rising, stand silent during the ceremony, on which Cunimund has turned his back.*)

ACT I

Scene 2.

The next morning. Alboin meets Rosamund, daughter of Cunimund, in a corridor of the palace. She is a tall, blond girl of great beauty, eighteen years of age.

Alboin:

Who art thou?

Rosamund:

One who hates thee!

Alboin:

Hate me not!

Who art thou?

Rosamund:

One who hates thee!

Alboin:

Say it not.

Thou beauty! Thou great yellow cat! Art wed?

Rosamund:

And if I were?

Alboin:

I'd slay him with these hands,

Were he a very king! Yea! Snap his back
And trample him!

Rosamund:

Lombards are gentle folk!

Alboin:

Who had thee?

Rosamund:

One with broader back than thou,
And sweeter breath.

Alboin:

He shall not have thee long!
Thou art all gold and red and white! Be sure
That thou shalt be my bed, my liliated bed!

Rosamund:

Thou hairy one! Hell's fire shall singe thy beard
Before a maiden of the Gepidae
Consent to thee!

Alboin:

Ha! Thou art maiden then!

Rosamund:

Whether or not is no concern of thine.
Now let me pass!

Alboin:

(*interposing*) Not with that mouth unkissed.

Rosamund:

I say that I shall pass! Thou bull o' the Pit
In which red Nero bellows on the fire!
Stand back! A cry from me and fifty swords
Shall hedge thee round!

Alboin:

Cry loudly!

Rosamund:

If I cry

A minute sees thee dead.

Alboin:

Then why not call

Thy wasps about me? Dost not recognize
The helmet that I wear?

Rosamund:

Of thee I know

More than thy heart shall ever know of me.

Alboin:

Be not too sure: a voice is in that heart
Which tells me I shall sack thee, marble tower,
And revel in thy treasures.

Rosamund:

(*angrily*)

Thou dost rave!

Have done now! I would pass. Delay me not.

Alboin:

Ha! not so furious! Talons of the cat
But glance on armor.

Rosamund:

There are spears to pierce
That corselet. Let me pass, thou Lombard boar!

Alboin:

Nay! Not so haughty! Dost thou think I stand
So far beneath thee? I am prince.

Rosamund:

And I

Was born a princess.

Alboin:

Ha! the weather clears!
Now can it be I wear thy sire's cuirass?

Rosamund:

My father lives, thank Heaven!

(The clash of footsteps is heard.)

Behold! He comes! *(Enter Cunimund.)*

Cunimund:

(to Rosamund) What dost thou here? Knowest
thou not this man?

Rosamund:

A man, thou say'st?

Cunimund:

And dost converse with him?

Alboin:

'T was not thy daughter's fault. I knew her not
And held her here awhile against her will.
I crave her pardon.

Cunimund:

Thou dost well to crave!
Come, Rosamund! I cannot breath the air
That holds both him and me; and Turisund
Forbids that I unbreath him.

Alboin:

Careful sire,
To save thee from thy brother's fate!

Cunimund:

Aye, bark!
'T is thou my father saves; his honor's shield
Protects thee, but the time shall not be long
Before we storm thy kennel. He is old,
And I shall soon be king.

Alboin:

And I be king
Ere long. My father weakens of the wound
He got at Asfield.

Cunimund:

When thou hast the throne,
Let Asfield bear our armies once again,
And God decide between us.

Alboin:

Ere the word

Be given, I would urge another thing,
At once become more dear to me than war;
I beg of thee thy daughter for my wife.

Cunimund:

Thou madman! Truly beauty stirs the blood
To foolish dreams! My daughter for thy wife!
And wilt thou have me for thy servitor?
My warriors to tend thy swine? My sire
To sing thee songs? My——

Alboin:

Cease! Not many words;
But they shall bring thee bitterness enough!
Thou hadst thy chance, and now indeed our God
Can be sole judge between us! Asfield waits
And the two-handed swords. As for thy brat,
She who might wed shall lie with me unwed.

Cunimund:

A Lombard's speech! Thou dost make ample proof
Of thy protection as a guest! Oh! haste!
And get thee past our borders, lest my steel
Break down the barrier that Turisund
Has reared between thy purblind insolence
And my just wrath! I beg that thou make haste—
I who do beg but seldom.

Alboin:

(to Rosamund)

Dost abide

By what thy sire affirms?

Rosamund:

Yea! more than that!

I pray thee to seek out a Scythian hag,
Some fat and scurfed monstrosity, and have
A dozen daughters by her! Make her queen!
She would be worthy of a Lombard throne!

Alboin:

Remember thou those words when next we meet!

*(He turns on his heel and strides
down the corridor.)*

ACT I

Scene 3

One year later. The war-tent of Alboin, now king of the Lombards. It is made of tanned hides, and strewn with the skins of wild beasts. Alboin, armored, waits, standing in the middle of the tent. The scream of a woman is heard.

Alboin:

(loudly) Bring in the pantheress!

(Two Lombard warriors enter, dragging with them Rosamund. Her hair is loosened, her hands tied behind her back.)

Rosamund:

Alboin! Thou shalt die!

Alboin:

(to the warriors) Get hence!

(The warriors leave the tent.)

Rosamund:

Yea! Thou shalt die!

Alboin:

(laughing)

In a good cause!

Rosamund:

Thou Lombard boar!

Alboin:

(doffing his helmet and placing it beside him)

Thou rosy apple!

Rosamund:

Boar!

My father's dogs shall tear thee!

Alboin:

(taking off his belt, to which the sword is attached, and laying it beside the helmet)

But till then—

Rosamund:

Thou dost not dare! I say thou dost not dare!

Alboin:

And if I dare, whose fault?

Rosamund:

Thou hadst no smile

Of mine to lure thee.

Alboin:

But I had thy face.

Rosamund:

A curse upon all beauty, if it lead
To thine embrace!

Alboin:

*(taking off his breastplate and laying it with
the rest of his harness)*

It leads.

Rosamund:

Thou dost not dare!

I am the daughter of a king!

Alboin:

Behold

A king!

Rosamund:

Ally of the Barbarian!

Alboin:

And came the bearded Gepidae from Rome?

Rosamund:

Thou friends of Scythians!

Alboin:

This from a Goth?

The raven to the vulture cried: "Away!

Thou feedest on the eyeballs of the slain!"

Rosamund:

My father is an eagle!

Alboin:

Ha! 't is plain

Whence came thy temper. It were well thy talons
Should know the knife.

Rosamund:

I say thou dost not dare!
Cunimund is my father! \

Alboin:

So he says.

Rosamund:

Turisund is my grandsire!

Alboin:

And is dead.

Rosamund:

Cunimund lives. Unless thou set me free,
The wolf-hounds of the Gepidae shall eat
Thine entrails!

Alboin:

Luckier shall thy wolf-hounds be
Than are thy warriors. Thine uncle rots
Upon the plain of Asfield, slain by me.

Rosamund:

Thou bloody beast! And when great Turisund
Made peace with thee, didst revel at his side,
In his own home, and no harm came to thee,
The slayer of his son!

Alboin:

He said to all
That so his honor lay.

Rosamund:

Dost speak that word,
When now the pitfall of thy perfidy
Has taken me, who but for lying tongues
Had never crossed thy borders?

Alboin:

In the halls
Of Turisund thy grandsire first I saw
Thy beauty, and I swore it should be mine,
And surely thou rememberest what I said.

Rosamund:

Thou art affianced to Elarica,
Daughter of Clovis' son.

Alboin:

Yet first I begged
Thy hand of Cunimund.

Rosamund:

The Gepidae
Mate not with Lombards!

Alboin:

One shall mate.

Rosamund:

Ah God!

Thou dost not dare!

Alboin:

(grasping her by the hair with his right hand)

Whence came this shimmering silk
That clothes thee like a mist?

Rosamund:

'T was Roman spoil,
But Rome is now our friend.

Alboin:

Rome is afar,
And distant now is Cunimund, thy sire.
'T is well, O Rosamund, for I would feed!

Rosamund:

Thou dost not dare!

*(He grasps in his left hand the fabric
about her breast, and tears it from
her.)*

ACT I

Scene 4

The plain of Asfield, a month later. Alboin, unarmed, and surrounded by the surviving chiefs of the Lombard nation, faces Cunimund, king of the Gepidae, and his Roman allies, including Flavius, their general.

Cunimund:

(to Alboin) Kneel, Lombard kern!

Alboin:

Lombards kneel not to men.

Cunimund:

'T is death unless thou kneel!

Alboin:

'T is death to me

To kneel.

Cunimund:

(holding his sword's point at the throat of Alboin)

Make now thy choice!

Alboin:

O Flavius!

This wolf is thine ally! Another year
May find him at thy throat.

Flavius:

Leave that to Rome.

Alboin:

Remember that the North has humbled Rome.

Cunimund:

And wert thou at the sack?

Alboin:

As near as thou!

Cunimund:

The loot of Rome is splendid in my halls.
This sword I bear was Caesar's.

Alboin:

It is thine

But by inheritance: the blade I bore
I wrested from thy brother.

Cunimund:

Lombard swine!
That blade is snapt, and given to the rust.
So kneel!

Alboin:

(*to Flavius*) I am a watcher of that wall!
On which the hostile East, a sea of swords,
Rolls billows that are nations. Is it well
That Lombard sentries bear this weight of scorn?

Cunimund:

O Flavius, leave to the Gepidae
The Scythian vigils! Leave as well to me
This aurochs we have trapped!

Flavius:

I think it best
That his humiliation be not great.

Cunimund:

Not great? This boar that spilt my brother's
blood

Upon this very field! This friend of fiends
Who in his madness dared to violate
My only child! Rome! I will geld the beast!

Alboin:

What good will come of that? Better for thee
My blood and thine should mingle. I have stained
Thy daughter, so the deeper her disgrace
If I be wholly shamed. My body and soul
Cry out for her, and but for her are dust,
And empty air, and carrion. Cunimund,
I beg of thee thy daughter for my wife!

Cunimund:

Thy wife!

Alboin:

My wife and mother of my sons.
My days are naught without her.

Flavius:

O Cunimund? Dost thou hear,

Cunimund:

Nay! Mix with Lombard mud
The life-stream of the Gepidae?

Flavius:

But think:
The mischief has been done. What's proffered now
Is reparation.

Cunimund:

Comes the word too late!
'T is vengeance now, nor shall he have a son
Of her or of another. Bind the bull!
He shall be ox!

(Four Gepidan warriors seize Alboin.)

Flavius:

O Cunimund, forbear!
I say this is not well for thee or me.
Rome's interests are not with such a deed.
Compose, I pray, this quarrel. Let your blood
Cement the wall that holds at bay our foes,
But let the blood be living and unshed.

Cunimund:

He has let enough of ours!

Flavius:

Today has heard
The death-cry of their thousands.

Cunimund:

But not his!
Forbear! Give me the knife!

Flavius:

Not so! For Rome
Diminishes if this man be unmanned.
So let there be arbitrament.

Cunimund:

By whom?
Who judges here but thee and me, O Rome?

Alboin:

Let Rosamund decide.

Flavius:

Well said! The girl
Has deeper interest than her sire.

Cunimund:

She? She?
But then, why not? (*to a warrior*) Bring
Rosamund. O Flavius!
Wilt thou abide her word?

Flavius:

Her word shall stand
For good or ill.

Cunimund:

Dost hear, thou Lombard bull?

Alboin:

I hear.

Cunimund:

And soon shalt hear thy doom.

Alboin:

Perchance.

Be not too sure: between her flesh and mine
Is made remembrance. She shall not forget
Our nights. A month of nights.

(Rosamund enters.)

Cunimund:

O Rosamund!

Three nations wait thy word. Behold this knife
That would avenge thy violated loins!
Shall this man be subjected to my will
And be a man no longer, or go free
But under heavy tribute and dishonor?

Rosamund:

A man? Go free? I do not—God!

Cunimund:

Thou hearest.

Why hesitate? What thing is in thy heart
That its blood is in thy cheek? Decide!

Rosamund:

Decide?

What is it I—

Cunimund:

What thing is in thy heart,
That thou shouldst stare so strangely on him?

Rosamund:

Nay!

Give me more time! A month! A week! More time!

Cunimund:

(*furiously*) Thou shalt give sentence here and
now! Make haste!

Rosamund:

Not now!

Cunimund:

The Lombard asks thee as his bride.

Rosamund:

He? Me? O Scythian dog!

Cunimund:

She has made known
Her judgment! Take her from us! Hold him fast!

Rosamund:

His bride! O Scythian dog!

Cunimund:

Swift! Lead her forth!

Rosamund:

Set not thy steel upon him! He shall go!

Kneel! Kneel to me, thou monster!

(Alboin kneels. She loosens her belt, lashes him across the face with it, and casts herself, weeping, into the arms of Cunimund.)

Harm him not!

ACT I

Scene 5

Three months later. The throne-room of the palace of Cunimund. Baian, chagun of the Avars, a Scythian nation, is seated on the throne. Alboin, in full armor, stands beside him.

Alboin:

'T is finished, and all Dacia is thine,
Even as I promised.

Bajan:

More than Dacia
Shall know my rule, when Avar wounds are
healed.

And thou? The ruin of the Gepidae
Thou hast contrived; but shalt thou stop at that?
Hast thou no dreams of conquest?

Alboin:

My hosts sweep south on Italy. In the spring

Bajan:

(*laughing*) Thou hast
Scant gratitude! Had not the Roman held

His legions from the battle, Cunimund
Might still be on this throne, not with the dead.

Alboin:

All that was Rome's concern. If Flavius
Sickened by Cunimund's ingratitude,
Kept sword to sheath, the consequence be his!

Baian:

Slowly Rome's shadow passes from the lands
Where once it lay so dark, and lay so long.

Alboin:

My nation shifts upon her. In its train
Follow the remnants of the Gepidae,
Sarmatian spears, and half the Saxon swords.

Baian:

A gentle wolf-pack!

Alboin:

Mingle with it thine,
And Justin well may tremble on his throne
Beside the Hellespont.

Baian:

I first would strike
To northward. Make thy conquest of the South,
And then once more two kings shall take the field.
(*Enter Ibor, a Lombard warrior.*)

Ibor:

My lord, we bring the princess
Rosamund.

Alboin:

Bid Aistulf enter with her.

Baian:

What is this?
The dregs of vengeance on thine enemy?

Alboin:

Today I make a queen—or something worse.

Baian:

Has Rosamund bewitched thee?

Alboin:

It may be.
The thought of her in other arms is Hell,
And worse than Hell!

Baian:

Such love will end in death.

Alboin:

It matters not. O see her where she comes!

*(Enter Rosamund, escorted by a
score of Lombard warriors. She
faces the two kings.)*

Now welcome, Rosamund!

Rosamund:

Thou murderer!

Thou Arian!

Baian:

(*laughing*) 'T is a gentle pantheress!
Alboin, where is thy whip?

Alboin:

O Rosamund!

To thee and thine have I been evil star.
Yet 't was for love.

Rosamund:

Thy love was infamy!
Now slay me and have done! I go to take
My father's hand in Heaven.

Alboin:

O take thou mine!

Here once again I beg thee as my queen.

Rosamund:

Beast! Slay me and have done!

Alboin:

Thy loveliness

I dedicate to life, not death.

Rosamund:

I beg

The mercy of thy sword.

Alboin:

(angrily) Nay! Thou shalt live,
And living, wed!

Rosamund:

This breast mates not with thine!

Alboin:

Yet shall it mate!

Rosamund:

Bring me the man, and see
How eagerly I turn from thee to him.

Alboin:

(laughing) The man! Ha! Ha! Baian, thou
hearest?

Baian:

Yea!

Show us the spouse.

Alboin:

The spouse? Ye little dream
The largeness of my heart!

(to Ibor)

Bring in the dwarfs.
*(Three hunchbacks are led in, each
huge of head and long of beard.)*

Baian:

Ho! Ho! A pretty crew! A fragrant pack!

Alboin:

(*to Rosamund*) My liberal hand allots thee not
one mate,
But three!

Baian:

(*laughing*) O generosity of kings!

Alboin:

(*to the dwarfs*) Seems the girl fair to you?

First Dwarf:

She is most fair!

Alboin:

Ye will be faithful to her bed and hearth?

Second Dwarf:

Aye! Faithful!

(*The other dwarfs nod their heads
eagerly.*)

Alboin:

I believe it. Ye shall be
The keepers of the royal swine, and fare
Right prosperously.

Third Dwarf:

(*leaping*)

King! Tremendous king!

Alboin:

Well, Rosamund, make now thy choice. Full proud
Were I to be assessed against that band
And found the worthier. But what's one mate,
Compared to three?

Rosamund:

Devil and Arian!

Oh! dost thou never waken in the night,
And know thy soul for what it is, and retch,
Sick with the shame?

Alboin:

My sleep is sound. Choose now
The sharer—or the sharers—of thy sleep.

Rosamund:

Despite of thee, I do believe in God!

Alboin:

(*pointing to the dwarfs*) He made them.

(to the dwarfs)

Do ye too believe in Him?

First Dwarf:

Yea! We believe! Give us the girl!

Second Dwarf:

Our thanks

Shall be to Him as well as thee!

Third Dwarf:

To thee
The heartier, O king!

Alboin:

(to *Rosamund*) Come, make thy choice!

Rosamund:

Not all their filth and hideousness, be sure,
Is half so vile to me, thou murderer,
As thy soul's midnight and the things that crawl
Within it! Not because I find less foul,
Less dreadful, thine embrace, turn I from them
To thee; but for the life within these loins,
My babe that I would cherish, choose I now
A royal shame and not the swineherd's hut . . .
O God! I do beseech Thee for a son
To cast Thy judgment on that guilty head!

(*She holds her hands to Heaven, then
points to Alboin.*)

ACT II

Scene 1

Four years later. A goldsmith's shop in the city of Verona, in Lombardy. Authari, the goldsmith, a white-haired man, holds a skull in his hands, and converses with Aio, a Lombard warrior.

Aio:

What do you with the skull?

Authari:

It comes to me

From Alboin. I am charged to make of it
A wine-cup.

Aio:

Tell me how the thing is done.

Authari:

The task is easy. I but saw the skull
In half. The lower part I cast away,
Then line the upper with a skin of gold.
Four golden bands shall clutch the outer side
And twining, make the handle and the base.
Then set I rubies deeply in the bands

And emeralds around the rest. 'T will make
A goodly cup. The skull, you see, is round.

Aio:

The man was of the North.

Authari:

The North had part
'T is certain, in him. But I was not told
His name.

Aio:

You may be sure he had the hate
Of Alboin.

(Enter Guelph, a singer.)

Guelph:

Alboin? What a king!

Aio:

Thou sayest!

Guelph:

Ravenna hears his trumpets, and calls out
'To Justin! Soon the forehead of that bull
Shall ring upon the trembling gates of Rome!
But there's a head whose war is done.

(pointing to the skull.)

Authari:

'T will be
In use when yours is dust.

Guelph:

Perchance. My songs

Shall not be dust.

Aio:

Will they be sung in Heaven?

Guelph:

Nay, but on earth.

Aio:

I'm not so sure of that.

Where are the songs of Caesar's harping-men?

Authari:

Hardly in Heaven!

Guelph:

It must be they sang ill.

Aio:

Perhaps they sing in Hell.

Guelph:

Well, better there

Than nowhere.

Aio:

Heaven send my soul content'

Let me be happy while I live! The dead

Are welcome to their revels.

Authari:

(holding up the skull) Here is one

Must grace the mortal banquets.

Aio:

As a cup!
I wager 't will be filled with sounder stuff
Than when it laughed and prated.

Guelph:

(*taking the skull from Authari*) It is strange!
Bethink you how within this little space
A world was centered. Mountains, seas and stars
Were there. The risen sun. The day.

Aio:

Look close:
Perhaps you 'll find a spider.

Guelph:

Peace! Where now
Is he who clasped it all?

Aio:

In Heaven or Hell.
Come—here are dice. Let's cast to know his fate.
I wager he's in Hell. To cap the bet,
We'll stake a flagon of Falernian.

Authari:

Give me the skull.

Guelph:

Take the poor bone. You see
That we have others.

Aio:

(*shaking the dice*) These are ivory,
Made of an aurochs' teeth—no less. I had
Them from a Gepidan.

Guelph:

And at what price?

Aio:

He's dead. We all must die.

Guelph:

Come, make your cast.

Aio:

(*casting*) The six and deuce: it looks ill for
our friend.

Guelph:

(*casting*) The five and deuce.

Aio:

Poor devil! He's in Hell,
Though by a narrow hazard. Let us go:
My tongue's as parched as his.

Guelph:

Farewell, Authari!

Aio:

Farewell! And you, old brain-box, fare you well!
May your soul wear as permanent^o smile,
Down there in Hell!

Authari:

Ah yes, I must to work.
The afternoon's half gone. Farewell to you!

*(They leave the shop. He holds up
the skull.)*

You grin, but not as though you liked my shop;
And yet the place is merrier than a grave.
Grin as you will—you'll make a noble cup.

ACT II

Scene 2

Two months later. Midnight in the banquet-hall of a palace in Verona. Alboin and fifty of his knights are seated at a semi-circular table. All are deeply flushed with wine. Guelph sings a war-song to the music of seven harps, the assembled company singing the chorus.

WAR-SONG

The raven screams, the war-ax rings,
The sun goes down the scarlet sky,
And redder with the blood of kings,
The heroes fight, the heroes die.

Chorus:

Mead for the hero!
Maids for the hero!
Song for the hero
Mighty in war!

Red is thine altar, god of war,
On which we offer up the foe.
Look earthward from thy battle-car
And see thy crimson rivers flow!

Oh! send the moon to give us light,
And grant the star a stronger ray,
That there be time for longer fight,
And few remain to greet the day!

Nearer the hungry ravens fly;
Redder than sunset gleams the sword;
Now louder roars the battle-cry;
The dead lie thick and War is lord!

Ibor:

Another toast! To the green grass!

Alboin:

Why so?

Ibor:

That it may flourish in Ravenna's streets!

(They drink.)

Ildichus:

Again! To the last Roman!

Ibor:

Why?

Ildichus:

That he

May shudder on the stake, and see Rome burn!

(They drink.)

Cleph:

Again! To Justin's beard!

(46)

Ildichus:

Why?

Cleph:

That the mouse

May litter there!

(They drink.)

Aistulf:

Again, and to his queen!

Ibor:

And why?

Aistulf:

That she have twins, boy twins, by me!

(They drink.)

Alboin:

Thou shaggy one, be not so free with queens!

Ho! I've a queen myself! Bring my great cat,

For I would see her fangs!

(Two warriors leave the room.)

Fetch also, Cleph,

My skull-cup.

The *(It is brought.)*

Fill it with Rhaetian So,

You'll see some sport before she drinks. 'T is
strange

That until now I never thought of it!

Wine is invention. Fill your cups! She comes.

Ho! to the queen!

*(Rosamund enters with her escort,
who leave her midway of the table,
face to face with Alboin.)*

Drink deep.

(They drink.)

Rosamund:

My drunken lord

Has need of me?

Alboin:

I drunk! *(to his knights)* O Lombardy!
Know now what I contend with! Is it thus
That love should speak? I drunk! Thou hast
grown sour
Because the Lord has tricked thee scurvily.

Rosamund:

Has tricked me? How?

Alboin:

(laughing) Didst ask of Him a son,
And got a squalling female. So He judged
'Twixt thee and me. A daughter!

Rosamund:

Have I come
To hear this mockery of thine own seed?
Or but to see with pride thy drunkenness?
Thou Scythian swine! Thou beast!

Alboin:

A beast? 'T is true!

What shall I be but beast when war is all?
Shall I sing songs to thee, and pluck a harp?
Shall I be priest, and mumble thee a Mass?
'T is well to be a beast! Were I not such,
Bethink thee in whose arms thou wert tonight---
An Avar's or a Goth's! But now thy couch
Is scented fabrics of the spoil of Rome.

Rosamund:

With thee to share it!

Alboin:

Hear her! It is so

The pantheress shows her teeth. Nay! Keep thy
place!

I am not done with thee. Didst see and hear
The health we drank to thee? Draw close. Drink
now

A health to us. Take thou this cup and drink.

*(Rosamund takes the skull-cup from
the hands of Alboin.)*

Now stand thou back! Lift up, O queen, the cup,
And drink to us from out thy father's skull!

*(Rosamund has set the cup to her lips.
She lowers it, stares at it, then at
Alboin.)*

Rosamund:

What hast thou said? From out my father's skull!

Alboin:

Aye! Glare, thou yellow cat! 'T is as I said.

Rosamund:

My father's skull! No! No!

Alboin:

I swear to thee
The skull of Cunimund is in thy hands!
Drink to us, Gepidan!

Rosamund:

Rather than drink,
This mouth shall thirst forever!

Alboin:

I am grieved
To find in thee this stubbornness. I fear
To trust our child to such a one as thou,
Lest she grow up a vixen. It were best
That gentler hearts should have the care of her.
This obstinacy irks me.

Rosamund:

By thy God,
If such thou serve, O Arian! I adjure,
I beg, I pray, I do implore thee now

That thou put by this wickedness! Abstain!
Take back this cup and leave to me my child!

Alboin:

Ah! Still it burns, that blow thou gavest me
Before the captains! In that shameful hour
Thou hadst thy choice; waits now another choice.
Decide! The cup or child?

Rosamund:

Destroy, O God!

This devil in his seat!

Alboin:

Decide! Decide!

I will not leave mine infant to a shrew,
However young. Decide! The cup or child?

Rosamund:

(lifting the cup to her lips)

I drink, O Alboin, to thy grave in Hell!

(She drinks.)

Alboin:

Leave that to those who'll dig it!

Rosamund:

(lifting on high the cup) Thou black boar!
Thou monster and assassin! Ah! thou fiend,
Before whose soul all fiends are white, take now
The curse of this libation! If there be

Justice or mercy in the heart of God,
Mayst thou alone of all His universe,
Lose it forever! Lo! within this cup
Is wine no more: this that I pour to thee,
O son of Audoin! has a deeper stain!
It is the blood of Cunimund I pour—
The pledge of thy damnation! See! It drips!
The life-blood of my father—and thy doom!

ACT II

Scene 3

Evening of the next day. Rosamund and Helmichis, armor-bearer to Alboin, are alone in her chambers.

Helmichis:

Alas, the white flame of thy loveliness!
The world is made its altar. From its light
All things fall back in shadow. Not a star
But is not stained beside it.

Rosamund:

Nay! I burn

With other fire!

Helmichis:

Say more.

Rosamund:

What need is there
That I say more? I will not eat nor sleep
With Alboin still alive!

Helmichis:

Then he must die!

Rosamund:

And is thy sword so dull?

Helmichis:

The sword is sharp,
And liege to thee, but Alboin is too great.

Rosamund:

Thou fearest him?

Helmichis:

It is no shame to me
To dread such might and valor. If such fire
Inform thy hatred, why not pierce his heart
Thyself?

Rosamund:

I could not do it save he slept,
And I would have him know a waking doom,
Alert, and with my mockery in his ears.
Yea! that the spirit of my sire exult!

Helmichis:

Thy sire has other joys.

Rosamund:

Go from me now!
Thou growest weak, thou coward!

Helmichis:

'T is unjust
To call me coward, when there stands no man
Who, single-handed, might not wince. That boar
Is shaggy, and the tusks are keen and great.

Rosamund:

But with a comrade thou wouldst dare?

Helmichis:

If he

Were stout of heart.

Rosamund:

A comrade shall be thine.

Helmichis:

And who?

Rosamund:

I know not yet, but be thou sure

He will be strong. Now leave me.

Helmichis:

Nay—not yet!

O star above the forest! Lonely light!

Descend, and meet the flame within this heart!

Rosamund:

There is a time for love, a time for death;

And this is not love's time.

Helmichis:

It may be love's

Last time.

Rosamund:

I say that death must lead to love.

So leave me: I would ponder on this death.
Farewell until tomorrow!

Helmichis:

Thou, farewell!
O beautiful in sleep! O beautiful
In all thy ways! Thou golden mystery!
Thou star of many sorrows! Thou supreme
And consummating music! In thy voice—

Rosamund:

(*angrily*) Wilt get thee gone?

(*Exit Helmichis. She stands lost in thought. Enter Clotilda, one of her maids.*)

Clotilda:

Thou callest?

Rosamund:

Nay—not I.

Clotilda:

I thought I heard thy voice. Some sound I heard.

Rosamund:

I spoke, but to another, not to thee.
Yet linger: there is something I would know.
Who is thy love?

Clotilda:

O queen, I know not love!

Rosamund:

Thou liar! Ah! thou blushing liar! Come!
Lie not to me! I know.

Clotilda:

I do not lie.

There is no man.

Rosamund:

I say I know. Come! Come!

What is his name?

Clotilda:

There is no man!

Rosamund:

Think not

To cozen me, for wandering by night
I have heard tender murmurs from thy room,
And moanings not of sorrow.

Clotilda:

Thou hast heard?

Rosamund:

Yea, heard! I scarce would see.

Clotilda:

Heard! I——

Rosamund:

Come, now!

His name!

Clotilda:

(*weeping*)

O ask me not!

Rosamund:

Swiftly! His name!

Clotilda:

Ah!—— Peredeus!

Rosamund:

Girl, thou shouldst be proud
And not ashamed, for Peredeus stands
Among the mighty. He is Gepidan,
Yet sits not far from Alboin at the feast.
Have done with weeping! When are ye to wed?

Clotilda:

He has no thought of marriage.

Rosamund:

That is ill.
I cannot have a maid of mine disgraced.
Be sure he boasts of thee among his cups.
Well, he shall marry.

Clotilda:

Queen, if it might be!

Rosamund:

It shall be. When is he to come again?

Clotilda:

An hour this side of midnight.

Rosamund:

That is soon.

Now hearken: get thee to my couch, and wait
Until the midnight sentries cry. Then come,
And lampless, to thy room, where I meanwhile
Shall have made sure this marriage, or by threats
Or by persuasion.

Clotilda:

O my gracious queen!

How shall I thank thee? O my more than queen!

Rosamund:

Reserve thy thanks until the ring is on.

Clotilda:

O loving one! O gracious one! O queen!

Rosamund:

Go now. But no—a little time remains:
Sing to me once, and with our northern harp.

Clotilda:

Wilt have the song of Agilmund?

Rosamund:

Yes, that.

(Clotilda sings.)

THE IRIS-HILLS

Up to the hills of iris we two went yearning.
O youth and youth's heart burning!
O winds of spring!

Far on the hills of iris two lay forgetful.
O rapture unregretful!
O fire of spring!

Down from the hills of iris we wandered slowly.
O lilies crushed and lowly!
O tears of spring.

Rosamund:

'T was on no hills of iris I have roamed;
Yet were my lilies crushed. O heart of mine!
How has life dealt with thee? As with the rest—
Much pain, a little joy?

Clotilda:

I too have wept.

Rosamund:

Wilt measure thy poor tears against the flood
That I weep not? What knowest thou of grief?
Go swiftly now: the time is very near.
And thy time, Alboin—it is close at hand!
Descend, O ravens of the Gepidae!

(Exit Clotilda.)

ACT II.

Scene 4

An hour later. The room of Clotilda. It is in darkness, and the curtains drawn.

Peredeus:

O madcap love! What is this whim of thine
To whisper, and to keep the room unlit?

Rosamund:

(whispering) Is all not beautiful?

Peredeus:

I scarcely know,
But know that I would see thy loveliness.
Come, light thy lamp!

Rosamund:

Be patient for awhile.

Peredeus:

Why waste thy beauty on the dark?

Rosamund:

Why waste
Thy heart on me?

Peredeus:

A man must love. Ah, Sweet!
Show me the breasts that have been mine tonight!
Thy beauty is my star.

Rosamund:

And stars are cold.
Be patient! Thou shalt see.

Peredeus:

I would see now.
What need is there of secrecy?

Rosamund:

What need?
How shouldst thou know, or I reveal too soon?
A little, and thou shalt have light enough!

Peredeus:

Enough is what I want.

Rosamund:

And soon shalt have.
What sound is that?

Peredeus:

It was the sentry's cry.
All's well.

Rosamund:

Be not so sure!

Peredeus:

Is all not well?

Ah, love! Thy lips once more! Thy burning flesh!

(The door is heard to open and shut.)

Was that the wind? I thought thy door was
locked!

(Rosamund slips from the couch.)

Where art thou? Wilt thou hide from me? 'T is
late

For modesty! Clotilda, where art thou?

Why hast thou left the couch of our delight?

Clotilda:

I have but come.

Peredeus:

What riddle's this? Return

To my embrace! Our joy is scarce begun.

Return!

Clotilda:

I say to thee I have but come.

Was a companion with thee?

Peredeus:

Thou alone.

Clotilda:

Has it been darkness in the chamber?

Peredeus:

Love,

Thou knowest. When has passion feared the
dark?

Never before was such an ardor thine!

Clotilda:

We have been tricked!

Peregrinus:

(springing from the couch) What meanest thou?

Clotilda:

Ah, God!

I did not dream!

Peregrinus:

What mystery is this?

Return to my embrace! I thought tonight
That thou hadst drunk a royal wine!

Clotilda:

Alas!

We have been tricked!

Peregrinus:

Where art thou? Light thy lamp!

Where art thou, Love?

*(Rosamund throws back the window-
curtains, and stands in a flood of
moonlight.)*

Rosamund:

Thy Love is here!

Peredeus:

The queen!

Clotilda:

(to Rosamund) Hast thou betrayed me?

Peredeus:

(to Rosamund) It was thou! Ah God!
Mad was the joy, and yet I did not dream!

Clotilda:

(to Rosamund) Alas! Thou hast betrayed me,
and for what?

Rosamund:

Thou shalt know shortly. Get thee to my couch
And wait me!

Clotilda:

Thou wilt stay alone with him.
Dismiss me not!

Rosamund:

Dost wish to walk the world
Without a nose? Obey! 'T will all be well.
Say nothing! *(exit Clotilda)*

Peredeus, art thou glad?

Peredeus:

Heaven and Hell possess me!

Rosamund:

Is it well

With thee, O Peredeus?

Peredeus:

It is well,

For I have clasped a queen; and it is ill,
Unwitting if I clasp a queen once more.

Rosamund:

A queen is thine forever—at a price.

Peredeus:

There can be none, with but a world to give
And but a soul to lose!

Rosamund:

Thou lovest me?

Peredeus:

'T is more than love. I seek another word
To tell this awe and marvel and delight
That rend me!

Rosamund:

And there is no price too great?

Peredeus:

There is no price! Thou art the sun in Heaven,
And I a star that sets!

Rosamund:

Nay—thou shalt soar,
And thine horizon shall be royal dust.

Peredeus:

What meanest thou, daughter of Cunimund?

Rosamund:

Thou shalt bestride the body of a king,
And Pavia's throne be thine, if thou but dare.

Peredeus:

With thee beside me?

Rosamund:

Yea, if Alboin die!

Peredeus:

The king shall die!

Rosamund:

And when the king is dead,
Thou shalt behold what love can be.

Peredeus:

Forbear!

This Heaven is enough!

Rosamund:

Nor shalt thou go
Alone to that encounter: at thy side
A comrade shall take half the shock.

Peredeus:

A comrade?

Rosamund:

There's one on whom the king has laid contempt,
And who would be at quits with him.

Peredeus:

His name—

Rosamund:

Helmichis, armor-bearer to the king.

Peredeus:

He! Alboin smote him once upon the mouth,
But 't was when wine was flowing. Can it be
That Helmichis would slay his lord for that?
Say rather that thou hast bewitched the man.

Rosamund:

I swear to thee there is no thought of love
Between us! In the morning we shall meet,
We three, and thy suspicion shall be cured.
Thou'lt find him staunch.

Peredeus:

As he has need to be!

That will be no light conflict.

Rosamund:

It will be

Less arduous than thou dreamest. Leave to me
Its outcome.

Peredeus:

Christ! What matter if I die,
I having known thy beauty? Yet I would
That I had known when breast was crushed to
breast.

Rosamund:

(Drawing the curtains) Thou shalt know all, for I
am thine alone,
And of this darkness Alboin's night is born!

ACT II

Scene 5.

*An hour before dawn, three days afterward.
The sleeping-chamber of Alboin, a large room,
dimly lighted. Enter Alboin and Rosamund.
He is dulled with wine. They go to his couch,
whereon he sinks heavily.*

Alboin:

Is earth about to end, that thou dost wait
To lead me to my bed?

Rosamund:

It is not well
That vulgar eyes should see my lord like this.

Alboin:

“My lord.” So I’m thy lord! Thou dost unbend.
So lately was it Arian, boar and beast!

Rosamund:

Thou art at least the father of my child.
Come, let me rid thee of thy belt and greaves.

*(She sits at his side on the couch,
and unbuckles the belt, to which his*

sword is fastened. She holds it in her lap, and slowly detaches the sheathed sword.)

Alboin:

Trouble thee not. It matters little.

Rosamund:

Nay—

Thou'lt sleep the better for it.

Alboin:

Thou art changed
From what thou wast when last we met. Perchance
My leopardess is tamed. Wilt doff thy robe
And share the couch with me awhile?

Rosamund:

I think

Thy memory is brief.

(She takes from her belt a scarlet cord, and begins to bind the sword to the sheath.)

Alboin:

(laughing) You mean the skull?
Ah, well, I'll give it thee, and Cunimund
Shall have his funeral at last.

Rosamund:

(weaving the cord)

O king,

Dost ever think on death?

Alboin:

I fear it not.

Rosamund:

(*still weaving*) Dost thou not fear what lies beyond the grave?

Alboin:

Why should I fear?

Rosamund:

(*weaving*) Oh! deeply shouldst thou fear!
Thou art stained black with sin!

Alboin:

Before the fight
I'm shriven, and meanwhile, whom shall I fear?

Rosamund:

(*weaving*) The spirit of my father!

Alboin:

(*laughing*) Shall his ghost
Prevail, where he prevailed not when alive
And in his harness?

Rosamund:

(*finishing her task*) Yea! He shall prevail!

Alboin:

What folly fills thy mouth? Come! Doff thy robe
And share my sleep!

Rosamund:

(rising, with the sheathed sword in her hands)

O king, thou shalt not sleep!
There is no sleep in Hell!

Alboin:

(angrily, rising on his elbow) Girl! Doff thy robe!
I do command thee!

Rosamund:

Lidless be thine eyes,
Forever and forever, deep in Hell!

Alboin:

Give me my sword!

Rosamund:

Was this the blade that slew
My father?

Alboin:

In fair fight.

Rosamund:

(lifting the sword on high) Then with this blade
I call thy doom upon thee, bloody boar!

*(She dashes the sword at the feet of
Alboin, who has risen from the couch
at her words. At the sound of its
fall, the door of the chamber is hurl-*

ed open, and Helmichis and Peredeus enter, armed with spears. Rosamund springs between them and the door.)

Alboin:

O dogs, what mean ye? Ye shall die for this!

(He picks up the sword and attempts to draw it from the sheath.)

Rosamund:

Not by thy hand! Ha! Ha! The boar is trapped!
Bethink thee now of Cunimund!

(Alboin wrenches at the sword. Helmichis and Peredeus advance upon him.)

Alboin:

Ho! guards!

Rosamund:

I have dismissed the sentries, and thy gates
Are locked. Have at the boar, my friends.

(Alboin hurls the sheathed sword at the head of Peredeus, who reels. Alboin grapples with Peredeus, seizing his spear. The spear of Helmichis pierces the loins of Alboin.)

Alboin:

Ye dogs!

Rosamund:

The boar is pricked!

(Helmichis withdraws his spear. Alboin reels back to the wall of the chamber. Helmichis poises his spear for a cast.)

Enough! He must not die
Too soon! Behold him bleed. Dost thirst, my lord?
I have prepared against it.

(She draws back a curtain before a recess in the wall, and reveals the skull-cup of Cunimund.)

Wilt thou drink?

(She takes the cup and proffers it to him. Alboin glares at her in silence.)

What! Can it be the king is not athirst,
Who thirsted so for blood of other men?
Then must I drink O Cunimund my sire,
Whose relic these avenging hands uphold,
Look down from Heaven and smile! Look up from
Hell,
Ye fiends that have prepared the living grave
Of Alboin, for I drink to him and you,
And to his torment through eternity!

(She drinks. Alboin falls dead upon

*his face. Helmichis and Peredcus
bring the butts of their spears ring-
ing to the stone floor of the chamber
Rosamund holds forth to them the
skull-cup of Cunimund.)*

ACT III

Scene 1.

*Late afternoon in the harbor of Ravenna.
Avitus, a Roman legionary, sits idly watching, and
sings softly to himself.*

Avitus:

(sings)

Oh! once a lovely maid I spied
Where forest shades were spread.
Me too she saw, and loudly cried:
I followed as she fled.

At last I caught the creature fair
And on the leaves we lay;
Yet what befell her beauty there
Is not for me to say.

But next when in the grove we met,
I felt another mood:
Ah! maids remember, men forget!
I fled—and she pursued!

(Solil.) 'T is a rare song. I had it of a girl
Of Umbria, who had it of a bard
Whose name she had forgotten. But she said

That he was ever drunk. Ha! lucky throat!
For in this nest of rats the wine is dear,
And plunder hard to come by. I've a thirst
Would make a Goth's seem like a nightingale's!
Damn this Ravenna's sun, that it devours
The natural juices in a man! I grow
As hard and dry as Justin's statue. Hell
Must not be much unlike this bed of dust,
Nor Libya greatly worse. Longinus sits
Cool in his palace, guzzling of the best,
Nor caring if a soldier's tongue hang out
A yard. I was a fool to choose the wars!
I should have kept a wine-shop. Thus it goes:
The sorrier the task, the less the pay!
A fever to Longinus, with no drink!

(Enter Iophon, a Greek sailor.)

Ho! gentle mariner! Delay awhile
Thy graceful steps.

Iophon:

Now what's my gait to you?
Are you a dancing-master?

Avitus:

Well for you

I were!

Iophon:

At least my gait is forward.

Avitus:

Now,

Where does that sally take us?

Iophon:

Ask the spears

That set you running for Ravenna's walls,

And keep you here, a badger in a hole!

I vow these Lombards set a merry pace!

Avitus:

(shrugging his shoulders)

Yonder's the craft on which the Lombard queen

Escaped her foes. Were you not of its crew?

Iophon:

Well for the queen I was!

Avitus:

How then? Were you

Her savior?

Iophon:

I say nothing. It is she

Who, if her heart is grateful, should announce

Her debt to me.

Avitus:

You mean you saved the queen?

Iophon:

I mean that on the Adige and Po

No Lombard keel prevented the escape.

Avitus:

So then they feared you?

Iophon:

On the water-ways
Men do not hold me lightly.

Avitus:

(*laughing*) Walls o' Rome!
So Lombardy drew back in dread of you!

Iophon:

Aye, laugh! But if I had you on our ship
The laugh were mine.

Avitus:

Peace, friend! It well may be
That on the sea your will is perilous.
To each his road. Be sure that I am glad
The queen came forth unscathed from that abode
Of northern wolves.

Iophon:

She had her need for haste!
What folly to believe the Lombard chiefs
Would leave a Gepidan upon the throne,
And that a woman, and a murderess!

Avitus:

She strove to reign?

Iophon:

Aye, for a day, then heard
What swords were sharpening, and so by night
She had Verona's wealth aboard, and fled.

Avitus:

And now she sits in safety—thanks to you!

Iophon:

I'm known upon the rivers.

Avitus:

(laughing) And on land?

Iophon:

On land you soldiers swarm like fleas; but then,
A flea is silent.

Avitus:

You should know!

Iophon:

I tell

A soldier from a flea by this one test:
A flea is better company.

Avitus:

Were not

Your sluggard crew a-sprawl upon this wharf,
You'd find another difference!

Iophon:

Go and bring

Your mates: 't is dull beside the water here.

Avitus:

You Grecian rat! Had I three comrades here
You and your crew would scamper!

Iophon:

We might run,
But not from you.

Avitus:

Whom then?

Iophon:

Why, from the fleas
That would desert you, eager to be gone
And perched on real men.

Avitus:

Be sure they'd shun
A Greek! Why, had you seen a Lombard spear,
Your trembling had disjointed you!

Iophon:

The spears
Of Lombardy have made a riftless hedge
Around your Rome. Her military arm
Seems feeble. Let her call upon the Greeks!

Avitus:

And let the geese save Rome a second time?

Iophon:

Her Eagles save her not.

Avitus:

Her Eagles flew

Victorious on Greece.

Iophon:

And now they sit

And moult, and blink bewildered at the sun!
Poor Rome!

Avitus:

Poor Rome, when Greeks and Ethiops
May jeer her!

Iophon:

Yet this Rome has sturdy sons.
A few more such as you, and her old power
Were shown the world.

Avitus:

A truth! But it is strange
To have you say it!

Iophon:

Greatly I admire
The legions—most in this: a soldier knows
Where wine is found the cheapest and the best.

Avitus:

A thing that's well to know.

Iophon:

And you can lead
To such a wine-shop; that I warrant.

Avitus:

Say

If you've the price.

Iophon:

We sailor-folk are poor
Who labor greatly for a little wage.

Avitus:

(moving off) Then to no wine-shop do you fare
with me!

Iophon:

Bilge in your wine!

Avitus:

A cockroach in your soup,
Pimp of the sea!

Iophon:

Return, for you have left
Your better part!

Avitus:

How then?

Iophon:

A Roman flea!

ACT III.

Scene 2.

*Forenoon of the following day. Ravenna.
The palace of Longinus, exarch and minister of
the emperor Justin. He is seated in his audience
chamber, accompanied only by Verus, his cham-
berlain.*

Longinus:

Thou sayest Rosamund is fair.

Verus:

My lord,

A golden lily!

Longinus:

Is it true report
That she has Alboin's treasure on the ship?

Verus:

How true thou soon may'st know: she waits thee
now,

Requesting audience. I thought it best
To tell thee first that she is fugitive,
With Lombardy's full fury at her heels.
Also the queen has treasure, small or great:

Thou knowest what reduplication goes
In tales of such.

Longinus:

I'll question her—alone.
Thou say'st she's fair: so much the better. Still,
This northern blood is cold and arrogant.

Verus:

She seems not haughty.

Longinus:

Bid her come. We'll see
What turned the head of Alboin.

(Exit Verus. In a moment Rosamund enters, alone. She stands before Longinus, and the two regard each other in silence.)

Rosamund:

Is it thus
A queen is greeted? Does misfortune shrink
The royal privilege, and courtesy
Observe not the unhappy?

Longinus:

(rising) Pardon me
A disrespect that does but seem! Thine eyes
Made me forgetful. Wilt thou sit, O queen,
Here at my side?

Rosamund:

(seating herself) I hoped insuavity
Had not a conscious part in thee. 'T is long
Since I have stood while others sat.

Longinus:

(seating himself) Thy rank
Shall find observance in Ravenna.

Rosamund:

Ah!

It minds me now I come for refuge here,
And am a throneless queen!

Longinus:

Thy quality
Is of the blood, not circumstance. Be sure
That in my name Ravenna kneels to thee.

Rosamund:

My thanks!

Longinus:

Nay! Thank me not! Wherefor is
power,
Except to pleasure beauty such as thine?

Rosamund:

Would that the Lombards thought as thou!

Longinus:

Forget

The throne that thou hast lost awhile! If I
Have such regard with Justin as I think,
Our legions like a tide shall sweep thee back
To that far eminence.

Rosamund:

'T is far indeed!
And I am weak and lonely.

Longinus:

Nay—not weak,
If thou hast borne Verona's treasure here.
Nor would I have thee lonely: beauty's face
Is not for solitude. Well art thou called
A golden lily!

Rosamund:

But a flower torn
From her true place, and set in blood! O prince!
I have known naught but violence since a child.
Always the clank of armor and the sounds
Of war! I long for peace!

Longinus:

It shall be thine.

Rosamund:

Peace is unpurchaseable. Were it not,
'T would soon be mine.

Longinus:

Thou meanest?

Rosamund:

It is true

That I have wealth. Within my galley's hold
Are splendors. All the cities of the North
Were sacked by Alboin. In their vaults he found
Part of the drifting treasure of the world—
Plunder of Rome, by Goth and Visigoth,
Vandal and Hun despoiled in years ago
And scattered and regathered and upturn
By all the winds of conquest. They abide
Awhile with me—the looped and banded gems,
The rings, the ingots, and the massy plate,
The necklaces and jewelries and crowns,
The silver of the violated East
And gold upheaped like honey in the hive.

Longinus:

Thou art a wealth more precious, and this gold
More beautiful than all the Caesars' hoard!

Rosamund:

(*smiling*) I please thee?

Longinus:

By the fortune of thy hair,
The immaterial silver of thy voice,
The gems that are thine eyes, speak not of gold,
For all thy treasures are not worth thy kiss!

Rosamund:

Thine own eyes play thee false.

Longinus:

Mine eyes would gaze
On thine forever!

Rosamund:

It is sweet, most sweet,
To know that I am welcome at thy court!

Longinus:

The word is weak! Thou comest as a wind
After long calm! The sight of thee is fire
Against a darkness!

Rosamund:

It is night with me.

Longinus:

And I would be thy morning!

Rosamund:

It is day,
If so thy heart speak truly,

Longinus:

Trust my words!
Better—make proof of them! Today I set
A palace at thy service, and its slaves,
The first of whom am I.

Rosamund:

Thou shalt not lack

My gratitude.

Longinus:

Speak not of that! The debt
Is mine who have beheld thy loveliness.

Rosamund:

Ah! that thy words be true!

Longinus:

Much more than words
Will I adduce to prove my fealty.
Thou shalt command, and I perform.

Rosamund:

'T is balm
To hear such promise from a man, for men
Have not been gentle with me.

Longinus:

Now begins
Another service. At thy feet is joy!

Rosamund:

(*rising*) And in mine arms?

Longinus:

(*rising*) Thine arms? Do I
hear right?

(*They embrace in a long kiss.*)

ACT III.

Scene 3.

Early evening of the same day. Rosamund stands alone on a terrace of the castle assigned to her by Longinus.

Rosamund:

(*Solil.*) Shall peace be mine? O eastern evening star!

The first to come, the last to go from Heaven!
There seems a calm within thy very flame,
But none within this heart. Where shall I turn
For some assurance of tranquility?
Whatever way I fare the gleam of swords
Is round me, and the fire of lustful eyes.
So must I lie and lure and make pretense
To man, the monster, lest he take by force
What should be given in gentleness. I think
His god is hoofed and of a brutish brow . . .
Now less and less I love these traitorous hours,
Lilies that root in steel and feed on blood . . .
A hundred hands lead me a hundred ways
And lead to nothing. Downward slants the road,

And shapes of death and horror and despair
Crouch in the shadows. O my little child!
Thou too must face it all! Thou too!

(Enter Peredeus)

Peredeus:

O queen!

Forgive this haste; since morning have I longed
To see thy face.

Rosamund:

Thou seest.

Peredeus:

Ah! thy voice—

A silver sword of music in the heart!

Ah! Rosamund! thou in whose eyes are set
Ages and tears.

Rosamund:

It is another gaze

That haunts me now. My thoughts are of the
night

When Alboin died. His death was life to me,

And yet I fear, remembering his eyes'

Malignant sapphire, furious and alive,

And how they blazed upon me ere he fell!

Peredeus:

Put by such thoughts. There is no more to fear.

Longinus is thy friend.

Rosamund:

Thou knowest not
The Roman friendship; it is for a price.

Peredeus:

Well, give him of thy treasure.

Rosamund:

Dost thou dream
A Roman is content with less than all?

Peredeus:

Give all: my sword wins more.

Rosamund:

O simple soul
Who dost not know the Roman "all!" Indeed
Thou art a warrior of the childish North!

Peredeus:

Yea! And this sword shall guard thee!

Rosamund:

Dream thy dream.
I fear 't will not be long.

Peredeus:

Ah! stand by me
Within this shadow of the bastion! So.
'T is dark enough. Thy lips! (*They embrace*)
Ah! Rosamund!
Thy mute and perfect beauty breaks the heart,

And all my blood is honey at thy kiss!

Rosamund:

Kiss me no more.

Peredeus:

Ah, queen, but I would kiss

Forever!

Rosamund:

There is one whose kiss shall last

Forever.

Peredeus:

Say no more! Abandon me

Thy mouth.

Rosamund:

I would not hold thee by my kiss,

As once I held thee on that night of sin

And madness of adulterous delight.

It cannot be again.

Peredeus:

Yea! It shall be!

I lean toward thee as Hunger toward his food,

Nor will I take dismissal!

Rosamund:

Ah! this life!

I seem as helpless as a blinded man

Who walks among blind lions. Who shall save,

Except my heart, if it be wise enough

And cold enough? Alas! What tears must be
Between the birth and burial of a queen!

Peredeus:

But I would spare thee tears.

Rosamund:

Thou knowest not
My burdens.

Peredeus:

I would bear them.

Rosamund:

Fly from me!
My road is downward.

Peredeus:

Life is beautiful.

Rosamund:

Life wears an iron iris.

Peredeus:

Thou shalt know
But happiness with me.

Rosamund:

Tonight I thought:
How white the foam, the stars, the moon! How
dark
Our souls!

Pereus:

O harass not thy woman's heart!
All shall be well! I swear it!

Rosamund:

Who art thou?
Thou hast thy valor, and a ready sword—
No more. What if the Roman claim my kiss?

Pereus:

But he is cold, men say.

Rosamund:

If men mistake,
And he desire me greatly, what of thee?

Pereus:

Then I must die, and thou shalt also die!
Thou wouldst not live without me?

Rosamund:

'T is not I
For whom my fears awaken. But my child?
Shall she be left alone? Ah, get thee forth!
Take of my treasure what thou wilt, and fly!
Go free of my disaster!

Pereus:

Bid thy breath,
Not me, to be the traitor and forsake
Thy service!

Rosamund:

Then thou wilt not go?

Peregrinus:

Not I,

For any peril that the Roman use!

Rosamund:

But if I beg thee?

Peregrinus:

(drawing his sword) What! Dost thou desire
The parting? Has Longinus won thy heart
Or thine ambition? Then indeed we die,
And now!

Rosamund:

Put back thy sword. I did but strive
To spare thee my confusions. Be it so:
We two shall fly together, if needs be,
Or die together, if our fates demand.
But now, go from me. I would sleep.

Peregrinus:

The night
Is young and starry, with a windless moon
And many nightingales. Give me thy lips.
(They kiss)

Rosamund:

Enough, my lover! Leave me now, for I
Must somehow plan to meet the coming bliss
Or certain doom.

Peredeus:

I would not go.

Rosamund:

Nay—go!

I must have time for thought, and time for sleep.
How else shall we outwit the Roman? Go!

(Peredeus leaves her.)

Now Heaven be refuge from these wolves that
love!

The pack surrounds me, and their eyes are fixed
Upon this breast my cunning cannot save.

So must one seize me. But that one shall be
The captain of that band. The rest shall seek
Their food with Death. 'T is I against the pack.
There must be no compassion, no delay.

Why fall to lesser fangs? Longinus' lair
Is near a throne. I may be queen again,
And Lombardy be shaggy with our spears . . .
The stars are out like moths around the moon.
I will be moon to men. The northern star
Shall have my favor, since his throne is fixed
And he joins not this swarm around my fire.
But I will be perdition to the rest!

ACT III

Scene 4

The next evening. Rosamund, in her chambers, converses with her maid, Latalla.

Rosamund:

Hast not a smile in all thy face? Why go
Forever silent? Thou wast pert enough,
There in Verona! What's amiss with thee?
Didst leave a lover when we fled?

Latalla:

Nay, queen.

Rosamund:

Then why this endless moping? Dost thou hate
Ravenna?

Latalla:

Nay, my queen.

Rosamund:

Then speak me plain
And tell me why thou art so sad of soul.

Latalla:

'T is nothing, O my queen!

Rosamund:

Thou art not frank.

Thou wast the blithest of my maidens. Now
An owl is gay beside thee.

Latalla:

It is naught.

Rosamund:

I say there's something here. Thou shalt speak
out,
Releasing me thy woe, or walk the streets;
For I am done with thee unless thou tell
Thy grief.

Latalla:

(*weeping*) Oh! ask me not!

Rosamund:

Speak!

Latalla:

Ask me not!

I fear!

Rosamund:

Fear not to speak. Come, tell me all!
Who is he that thou fearest?

Latalla:

He is great,

And near to thee.

Rosamund:

Not Peredeus?

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Latalla:

Yes.

Rosamund:

Why dost thou fear him?

Latalla:

Only if I speak

That which I heard.

Rosamund:

I swear I will keep faith
With thee in this! He shall not know a word
Of what thou tellest. Come, be frank!

Latalla:

Ah, queen!

It is so little—and so much!

Rosamund:

Come, speak!

Latalla:

I long to speak: it burns me so within!
'T is of Clotilda.

Rosamund:

Ha! the jade who hid
The night of our escape!

Latalla:

She did not hide.

Alas!

Rosamund:

She did not hide?

Latalla:

She would have come.

She longed to be at Peredeus' side.

Rosamund:

Why came she not, then? Who prevented? I
Called loudly for her when we fled.

Latalla:

I too

Called out, then hastened to her chamber . . .

Rosamund:

Then?

Latalla:

The door was closed. Within, I heard the sound
Of voices.

Rosamund:

Whose?

Latalla:

A man spoke deep and low;

And she cried out as in despair, and said

She would not stay behind us

Rosamund:

Yes, and then?

Latalla:

(*weeping*) I fear to say!

Rosamund:

Fear nothing, trust thou
me!

Latalla:

Twice more he spoke. She, more unhappily,
Made answer. Then, before the words were done,
Her voice shut like a door! There was no sound.
Then, suddenly, I heard a fleshly click,
As when the tongue is clacked.

Rosamund:

Ah! . . . Then?

Latalla:

No more.

I ran and hid not far away. Ten breaths,
And one came softly from Clotilda's door:
'T was Peredeus, and his face was white.
He hastened past me, champing with his jaw,
He spied me not.

Rosamund:

Say on.

Latalla:

I heard thee call,
And knew the time was on us for the flight;
Yet ran I to that door, and loudly called:
"Clotilda!" and "Clotilda!"

Rosamund:

And?

Latalla:

No sound.

Ah! worse than that! A silence like a shriek!
I listened: still the horror of that cry
That was no cry . . . I dared not lift the latch . . .
I ran to thee. I was the last to leave
The palace. Save me! Thou hast made me speak!
If Peredeus—

Rosamund:

Hold thy heart in peace.
He shall know nothing of thy words . . .

(A page enters)

What now?

The Page:

Longinus, exarch of the emperor.

Rosamund:

Admit him. *(to Latalla)* Take thy sleep, and
have no fear.

*(Exit Latalla. Longinus enters, un-
attended.)*

Welcome, my lord! The day seemed long to me.
May night seem not so long!

Longinus:

Ah! Rosamund!

Thou lily of the Lombards!

Rosamund:

Sweet to me
'Thy words' caress! With Alboin, it was "Cat!
Thou yellow cat!"

Longinus:

Thou gold of all the stars!
Gold of the flowers! Gold of sunset's foam!
Thou marvel!

Rosamund:

I am gold for thee to spend.
Aye! spend, yet hoard me! Be my treasure-
house,
My refuge, and the sentry at the gates!
Thou too art regal.

Longinus:

If I sit with kings,
It is that I be worthier a queen.

Rosamund:

(*drawing close to him*) A queen desires thee.

Longinus:

Queen, hast thou known love?
It was not love thou hadst in Alboin's grasp!

Rosamund:

'T was loathing.

Longinus:

Has no lover found thy couch?
Was there escape for beauty such as thine?

Rosamund:

I feel

His eyes upon me when my back is turned.
His glances pierce my garments!

Longinus:

Ha! the dog!

Rosamund:

I think that I am ever in his thoughts,
And amorously.

Longinus:

Ha! the Dacian dog!
He shall have Hell to gaze on!

Rosamund:

Fear thou not:

I shall refuse him.

Longinus:

(*choking*) Thou! Refuse! Dost think
I'll have that stripping gaze on thee again?
"Refuse him!" Shall he have a tongue to plead,
Or ears to know refusal? Am I lord
Of this Ravenna? Shall I plead with him,
And ask that he accept my rivalry?
No more of him tonight!

Rosamund:

Thou wilt protect
My life against his jealousy?

Longinus:

Enough!

Shall one man stand between me and my joy?
Thou'rt safe of him forever, and his gaze!

Rosamund:

Thus I reward thee: what his gaze would do
Thou shalt do with thy hands.

Longinus:

O night of love!

ACT III.

Scene 5.

Forenoon of the next day. Rosamund's chambers. It is late morning. She is alone, and gazes from an open window.)

Rosamund:

(*Solil.*) How beautiful! Whatever way one
look,

Earth brims the heart and eyes with loveliness.

Why should it not be Paradise, as now

It seems? Ah, men! ye are the serpents here!

Eternal violence and hatred mark

Your ways upon the world. Ye make of life

An evil dream to one that would know love!

Ye make of love a mockery. Your love!—

The coupling of mad lions ere they fight!

I will have none of it! And yet I must,

To live at all, and fend my little one

From these despairs. She shall have gentler
years

Ah! to be queen of those unresting beasts!

To see them cower at the lashing word!

'T is there alone lies freedom.

(*Enter Helmichis*)

Helmichis,

Thou didst not ask for entrance!

Helmichis:

I have heard

There is another one who asks it not!

Rosamund:

Thou speakest of—

Helmichis:

Longinus!

Rosamund:

Softly! Veil

Thy voice!

Helmichis:

The Roman shall not share with me!

Rosamund:

The Roman shares not with thee.

Helmichis:

That is false!

Rosamund:

'T is true I gave him audience yestereve.

He spake but of my treasure, for the man

Is cold. Thou seest he is not young. His heart

Is set on wealth.

Helmichis:

Why stayed he then so late?

Why was I barred from here?

Rosamund:

It was not wise
To thrust another on his company;
And he was late in mine because I showed
What he would see.

Helmichis:

Thy gold?

Rosamund:

What else but that?
Man, art thou mad? Dost thou not see our lives
Await his whim? A word, and we are cast
Back to the Lombard! Dost thou long to sit
Upon the stake, and tell the night thy woe?
Where then were our embracings? I but use
My woman's wit to serve us.

Helmichis:

See thou use
But wit! I am not sure of thee. At times
I muse on Peredeus. It is strange
That he became so swiftly our ally!
Now what were thy persuasions?

Rosamund:

I have told
That tale not once but twenty times! O fool!
Thou knowest he was Gepidan. His heart
Cried out to Cunimund.

Helmichis:

It cried not loud.

But he was loud at all the Lombard feasts..
I like it not. Another thing: thy maid?
Why stayed she in Verona when we fled?—
She that was bed-mate of thy Gepidan.

Rosamund:

She stayed of her own will. At the last hour
I called for her. She came not. Was it fault
Of mine?

Helmichis:

I like it not. Do lovers part
So readily ? Was Peredeus sad
Upon the rivers? Has he grieved at all?

Rosamund:

That brings to a word that must be said:
What now of Peredeus?

Helmichis:

Thou dost mean—

Rosamund:

Thou knowest what I mean. The palace walls
Ring with the news.

Helmichis:

Indeed I do not know.

Rosamund:

Thou knowest not he was found dead at dawn,

A dagger in his back?

Helmichis:

I did not know.

I slept till late, and since have hastened here.

Rosamund:

Thou dost accept his death with small concern!

Helmichis:

I hated him.

Rosamund:

Good friend he stood to thee,
That night when Alboin died.

Helmichis:

It was my spear
That let the blood.

Rosamund:

Except for him thy spear
Had not been used.

Helmichis:

Ever I find it dark
That he stood by me. Wherefore should he wait
Ally to us? .

Rosamund:

It is less dark to me
That Peredeus died, with thee alone
His foe in all Ravenna.

Helmichis:

Hold thy tongue!

I said that I know nothing of his death!

Rosamund:

Thou bringest very gently to my mind
That I am queen no more. As tenderly
Thou showest me my station in thy heart.
Thanks to thee, Helmichis!

Helmichis:

Must I go mad?

Oh! dost thou need conviction of my love?
I say I will not live if thou remain
Here in Longinus' power! Nor shalt *thou* live!

Rosamund:

So thou assumest lordship. I am glad
To know so well thy heart and its intent!
In many things all men are much alike!

Helmichis:

Have done! The ironic grace becomes thee not.

Rosamund:

I speak more frankly than thou dreamest

Well,

Thou givest me the choice of life with thee,
Or death in this Ravenna. Had I known
Thy love held such renouncement of thyself,
I had not questioned it.

Helmichis:

So strange thy smile
I know not if thou mean thy words. At least,
Such love, I swear, is mine, and cannot change.

Rosamund:

Bethink thee, Helmichis—an evil star
Am I, disastrous in a thousand ways.
Why share with me my path of pain and death
On heavens as yet uncharted? Half my wealth
Is thine. Go forth with it! Seek kindlier skies,
Before the doom is uttered.

Helmichis:

'T is too late:
Thou, thou alone!

Rosamund:

'T is not too late! Go forth
Before the shadow falls! Thou hast thy choice.

Helmichis:

I want no choice. Thou, thou forever!

Rosamund:

For a little I was happy in thine arms:
The flesh remembers. Go, while there is time!

Helmichis:

I will not go, for all the exarch's swords!
'T is thou or death!

Ah!

Rosamund:

Ah, well! It must be I.

But thou'lt repent the choice.

Helmichis:

There is no choice

For one that knows thy love.

Rosamund:

Then lay thy plans

For flight, which must be secret, and be soon.

We'll brave Longinus, since the thing must be.

Go now: I too must ponder.

Helmichis:

Queen, thy kiss!

(Rosamund kisses him.)

O rapture scarlet in a thousand veins!

O beauty past the human heart to bear!

Before thy face the gates of memory close,

And thou alone art made the heavens and earth!

Farewell awhile!

Rosamund:

Farewell! Nay—ere thou go,

Drink to our fortunes in Falernian.

It may be better portent.

(She goes to an alcove, takes up a golden cup and flagon, and pours for him.)

Helmichis:

(taking the cup) Rosamund!

To thee and me and to our happier stars!

(He drinks and sets the cup on the table beside him.)

Rosamund:

Drink all.

Helmichis:

A moment. As I drank, it seemed
I heard a crying from afar! The voice
Was that of Peredeus.

Rosamund:

If he cry
'T is from another Land.

Helmichis:

What wine was that?
It has strange flavor for Falernian,
And glows within more strongly.

Rosamund:

It is wine
That Alboin used. He mixed with it a herb
To make him merrier. Disquiet thee not.
Finish the cup.

Helmichis:

How searchingly it burns!
A giddiness is on me! *(Reels)* How it burns!

Rosamund:

'T will pass. It is the nature of the herb.
Fear not.

Helmichis:

(*clutching at table*) It does not pass! It flames!
It flames!

By God! I have been tricked by thee, thou fiend!
The draft was poison!

Rosamund:

Nay!

Helmichis:

'T is true! The draft
Was poison! Ah! thou viper! Ah! thou bitch!

(*She endeavors to slip past him. He
seizes her and drags her to the table.*)

Drink thou what's left!

Rosamund:

Barbarian!

Helmichis:

(*holding his dagger to her breast*) Take the
cup! (*She takes it.*)

Now drink, as I, to thee and me and death!

(She drinks. The cup falls from her hands, the dagger from the hands of Helmichis. They stand embracing. She throws back her head, and gazes into his eyes.)

Rosamund:

I have drunk, as thou, to thee and me and death!

The End.

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